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POPULATION SHIFTS IN FINNISH KARELIA

Description

A survey of the shifts of the inhabitants of Finnish Karelia during the Soviet-Finnish Wars (1939-1944)

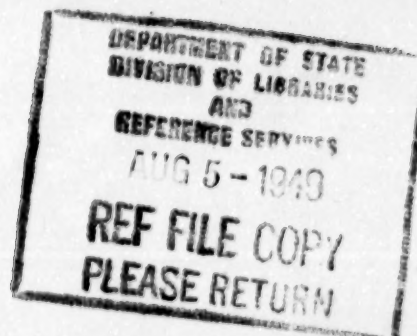
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SUMMARY

1. In anticipation of the cession of the Karelian Isthmus and Ladoga Karelia to Russia after the Winter War of 1939-40, some 400,000 Finnish refugees were evacuated to Finland proper.

2. The resettlement of these evacuees, of whom about half were agrarian workers and the remainder industrial and professional, proved difficult in view of Finland's adverse economic position after the war. Finnish sources have emphasized the success of the rehabilitation in view of the circumstances, but Soviet sources and the refugees themselves expressed dissatisfaction at the treatment they received.

3. When the war between Russia and Finland broke out anew in 1941, the Finns soon recaptured the areas previously ceded to Russia, and a return movement of the refugees took place. Somewhat more than 265,000 persons returned to the disputed territory at this time.

4. The peace settlement between Finland and Russia in 1944 once more ceded the border areas to Russia. Some 250,000 persons again were evacuated to Finland during and after hostilities.

5. The new resettlement inside Finland has again produced some difficulties. Disputes over the areas of resettlement.

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tlement, conflicts between the evacuees and the previous residents of the areas, and economic problems have arisen. There is some indication that Russia will encourage a return of the original population to their homes in the ceded territory, and that such a transfer may take place.

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POPULATION SHIFTS IN FINNISH KARELIA

I. THE WINTER-WAR EVACUATION, 1939-40

Among the territories ceded by Finland to the USSR in March 1940 as a result of the Russo-Finnish peace treaty, the most important were the Karelian Isthmus (which contains Viipuri, the second largest city in Finland) and Ladoga Karelia, the region around Lake Ladoga. These were the only densely populated areas ceded to Russia. In addition to the inhabitants evacuated during the hostilities, some 100,000 additional Karelians left after the armistice under the terms of the peace treaty, which authorized persons who wanted to leave the ceded territories to do so within a limited period of time.

The total number of Karelians evacuated at that time is generally placed at 450,000. This figure is contradicted by numerous reliable sources. The Finnish Ministry of Social Works placed the total pre-war population of the ceded Karelian territory (Karelian Isthmus and Ladoga Karelia) at only some 420,000.¹ Another official report implied a figure of 415,000.² That the number of evacuees was even slightly below those figures is indicated by data on the return movement to Karelia in 1941-43, after those territories had been reconquered by the Finns. The International Labor Office has received from

1. Social Tiedskrift Utgiven av Socialministeriet, Helsinki, No. 9-10, 1942.

2. News from Finland, 26 January 1943.

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the Finnish Legation in Washington various reports for the period from November 1942 through May 1943 on the number of persons who returned to Karelia and on those still in Finland proper. These figures indicate a total of 387,000 to 394,000. Taking into account the hardships which the refugees had to undergo, both en route and at their final destination, on the one hand, but considering on the other hand the fact that there were no reports of mass mortality, the number of Karelian refugees in 1940 may thus be estimated at about 400,000.

In 1943, the Finnish Legation in Washington was asked to give any data which might explain the discrepancy between the generally accepted figure of 450,000 Karelian refugees and the considerably lower figures both on the Karelian population, and on the number of refugees derived from the ILO data.

T. O. Vahervuori, Counselor of Legation, gave the following explanation:¹

"I believe that the contradiction may be at least partly explained by the fact that the total number of people -- some 450,000 in round figures -- who migrated from their homes as a result of the Moscow peace in March 1940 did not cover only Karelians but also other inhabitants in certain other parts of Finland immediately affected by peace terms. For example, all residents of the city of Hanko and surrounding territory 'leased'

1. Letter of the Finnish Legation in Washington, dated 22 December 1943.

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to Russia for 30 years, had to seek new homes elsewhere in the country. They numbered about 10,000. In addition to the ceded area located within the province of Viipuri (West Karelia), certain communities or parts of communities located further north, within the province of Kuopio, Oul, and Lappi, were also ceded to Russia, and their inhabitants -- totalling some 23,000 -- were likewise evacuated. Thus the number of strictly 'Karelian' evacuees was not more than 417,000. And this number has no doubt been subsequently reduced by quite a few deaths among the evacuees, many of whom were old people in poor health."

II. THE FIRST RESETTLEMENT, 1940-41

Between the Winter War and June 1941, an attempt was made to resettle the evacuated 400,000 Karelians on the territory of Finland proper.

About half of the Karelian refugees belonged to the agrarian population.¹ A special bill passed by the Finnish parliament provided for the speedy settlement of the transferred population on the land. So far as the necessary land could not be obtained on a voluntary basis, expropriation measures were introduced.

The other half of the Karelian evacuees, however, were persons previously engaged in industry, commerce, the handicrafts, the liberal professions, building, and other trades.

1. Deutsche Agrarpolitik, No. 12, September 1943, p. 380.

The task of providing a means of livelihood for this section of the population was particularly difficult in 1940. Finland's lanes of commerce lying directly in the war zone, her foreign trade was crippled. Industry on the Finnish side of the new frontier was finding it difficult to provide sufficient work for its own labor force, much less the evacuees. Furthermore, it had been possible to move only some of the industries from the ceded areas to inner Finland. Thus it was necessary to retrain workers so as to be able to direct them to other branches of activity. As a stopgap, they were employed in state-organized construction work of various kinds such as road and bridge building, and railway construction.¹

Finnish (non-Karelian) observers, as well as foreigners,² have emphasized the tremendous rehabilitation job accomplished by the Finnish Government over a short period of time, especially in view of the effects of the Winter War on Finland's economy and the general difficulties resulting from the World War.

Soviet sources, on the other hand, have sharply criticized the policy of the Finnish Government with regard to the resettlement of the Karelians. A Tass dispatch from Stockholm of

1. Buhler, Jean. "Reconstruction en Finlande". Gazette de Lausanne, 22 January 1941.

2. Strode, Hudson. Finland Forever, New York, 1941.

Thoss, Alfred, "Die Umsiedlungen und Optionen im Rahmen der Neuordnung Europas". Zeitschrift fuer Geopolitik, March 1941.

Buhler, Jean. "Reconstruction en Finlande". Gazette de Lausanne, 22 January 1941.

24 January 1942¹ reported that since their evacuation, the Karelians "are roaming about the whole country, without shelter and work. The Finnish Government has pledged them to hunger and poverty. At present the Karelians are sheltered in sad lodgings and in abandoned sheds. Cattle, which few among them possessed, had perished, for, according to the newspaper Karjala (organ of the Karelian refugees), the authorities had not supplied even the poorest Karelians with fodder." The Karelians themselves were not satisfied with the attitude of the government, and claimed that they had not always been sufficiently well treated by the rest of the nation.²

III. RETURN MOVEMENT, 1941-43

The resettlement of the evacuated Karelians was interrupted when, in June 1941, the war between Finland and the Soviet Union broke out again. The Finns soon recaptured Viipuri, the Karelian Isthmus, and Ladoga Karelia. The return movement of the evacuated Karelians began as early as the fall of 1941.³ It was a spontaneous movement of persons waiting merely for permission to return home. The Finnish authorities encouraged and supported this movement, and immediately set about the re-

1. Pravda, 26 January 1942.

2. Karjala, Viipuri, 29 September 1943.

3. The New York Times, 28 October 1941. News from Finland, 13 March 1943.

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building of abandoned houses and the restoration of agricultural activity, as well as the re-establishment of commerce and industry.¹

By the end of 1941 some 77,000 Karelians had returned. A second wave of Karelians was repatriated in the spring of 1942.² The total number of repatriates as of September 1942 was placed at 220,000 by official sources.³ According to the Finnish Legation, the return movement had practically been at a standstill from the winter of 1942-43 to the end of April 1943.⁴ According to the information of various welfare centers, the total number of Karelians who had returned by the beginning of 1943 was only 237,529 persons.⁵ A Finnish radio broadcast of 30 June 1943 stated that about six thousand Karelians had returned to their homes during the month of May. On 3 September 1943 Karjala (Viipuri) reported that, as of that data, there were 265,000 Karelians in the reconquered territories. Subsequent repatriations were apparently of moderate size, since as late as the end of April 1944, when the repatriation period was well over, 110,578 Karelians still remained in

1. "Wiederaufbau Kareliens." Die Deutsche Volkswirtschaft, No. 5, February 1943.

2. News from Finland, 26 January 1943.

3. Social Tidskrift Utgiven av Socialministeriet, Helsinki, No. 9-10, 1942.

4. Letter of the Finnish Legation in Washington, 22 December 1943.

5. News from Finland, 6 February 1943.

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in Finland proper.¹

The slowdown in the pace of repatriation was due mainly to the continuation of hostilities. The majority of the returning refugees went to Ladoga Karelia and to the central part of the Karelian Isthmus. At the beginning of 1943, some communities in these areas had already recovered as much as 90 percent of their pre-war inhabitants. But along the coast of the Isthmus and on the frontier, in areas where fighting continued, only a small proportion of the inhabitants had returned.²

IV. THE SECOND EVACUATION, 1944

In 1944, peace with the USSR and the resulting cession of territory brought about a new evacuation from the Karelian Isthmus and Ladoga Karelia.

According to Hufvudstadsbladet of 21 August 1944, there were by that time 236,000 evacuees in Finland. Among them were 182,902 persons listed as "recently evacuated." It may be assumed that these were Karelians evacuated again in view of the Russian offensive, whereas the remaining 100,000 were Karelian refugees from the Winter War who had not been involved in the return movement to Karelia.

After the conclusion of the peace with the USSR, accord-

1. Uusi Suomi, 29 April 1944.

2. News from Finland, 26 February 1943.

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ing to which the Karelian Isthmus and Ladoga Karelia were once more to be ceded to Russia, a new evacuation began. Nya Dagligt Allehanda of 7 September 1944 reported that the transfer was then in full swing and that at least 70,000 civilians would have to be moved before the territory was evacuated.

Together with the 133,000 "recent evacuees" mentioned above, there was thus an apparent total of some 250,000 Karelians who came to Finland in 1944. The figure was confirmed by the Deputy Minister of the Interior, Laukka, who said in an interview that about 250,000 Karelians had been evacuated.¹ Thus almost all the Karelian refugees from the Winter War, who in 1941-1943 had returned to their homes, were now again evacuated to inner Finland.

V. AREAS AND PROBLEMS OF RESETTLEMENT

The selection of resettlement areas for the Karelian evacuees proved to be a difficult problem.

In 1940 it had been decided to settle the inhabitants of the Karelian Isthmus, who constituted the overwhelming majority of the evacuees, in Central Finland, and to install the population of the Ladoga coast in Vaasa, on the Gulf of Bothnia.

The refugees originating from the Karelian Isthmus, however, insisted that they be settled in Southern Finland.

1. Stockholms Tidningen, 13 September 1944.

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They stubbornly opposed resettlement on new land, in more northern regions, despite the fact that conditions in the South were less favorable for the colonization of new settlers. The southern part of Finland is the most densely populated. The installation of the Karelian refugees in this area would have led to a further subdivision of the already intensively cultivated soil of this region, thus reducing food production in the face of increased demand.

Nevertheless, it seems that the demands of the Karelians were at least partly accepted. Many were settled in Southern Finland. It has been reported¹ that entire Karelian communities have been installed in the province of Uusimaa (Nyland) bordering the Gulf of Finland. This colonization, as well as the resettlement of the Ladoga Karelians on the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia, brought violent recriminations from the Swedish-speaking population of these areas. The Finnish Swedes, who constitutes about 10 percent of the population of Finland, are settled mainly in the Southwest, on the coasts of the Gulfs of Finland and of Bothnia. They feared that an increase of the Finnish element in this almost purely Swedish area would encroach upon their interests.² They also suspected that the

1. Thoss, Alfred. "Die Umsiedlungen und Optionen im Rahmen der Neuordnung Europas." "Zeitschrift fuer Geopolitik," March 1941.

2. Geographische Zeitschrift, 1941, No. 3, pp. 193-194. The New York Times, 9 March 1941.

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Finns, through the introduction of a large Finnish element, intended to transform this region into a bilingual area.¹

In 1944, the Karelians have been directed mostly to the same areas as in 1940. According to the interview with Minister Laukka, quoted above, the Karelians have now been sent to the provinces of Mikkeli (St. Michel), Kuopio, Häme (Tavastehus), Vaasa (Vasa) Turku (Åbo), and Oulu (Uleåborg). The first three provinces are situated in inner Finland, to the West of the province of Viipuri (Viborg) ceded to the USSR, from where the Karelians have been evacuated. There the population is chiefly Finnish. But the latter three, situated along the Gulf of Bothnia, contain an unquestionable Swedish majority.

The relations between the newcomers and the residents do not seem to be too cordial. The Karelians complained of a lack of sympathy towards evacuees who have twice been driven from their homes.² The Board of Education had to appeal to all elementary school inspectors to help the Karelian evacuees by exhorting people to be friendly towards them. In schools pupils were to be informed how friendly Karelian homes received

1. Thoss, Alfred. "Die Umsiedlungen und Optionen im Rahmen der Neuordnung Europas." Zeitschrift fuer Geopolitik, March 1941.

2. Vasabladet (Vaasa), 15 August 1944.

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Finnish soldiers during wartime.¹ On the other hand, the Finnish Swedes argued that "the method of billeting the evacuees has been unsuccessful;" the language difference does not permit "friendly and smooth intercourse;" Furthermore "the guests show no power of adapting themselves to the customs of the provinces."²

But even more serious were the economic complications which resulted from the new mass evacuation. The Karelians insisted that the evacuated peasants should immediately be given a chance to continue farming and the Finnish authorities were urged to provide the evacuees with the necessary land.³ To this end, the partition of estates in southern Finland, which had been planned in 1940 but never carried out, is again under consideration.⁴

The absorption of the mass of Karelians will certainly be a difficult task for Finland at the time. They may, in the long run, prove of benefit to the Finnish labor market, as a compensation for the population losses suffered during the war years. During the first Finnish-Soviet war, the Finnish casualties were estimated at 66,000 men, of which 23,000 were killed and the rest wounded. There is no official

1. Hufvudstadsbladet, 10 September 1944.
2. Vasabladet (Vaasa), 15 August 1944.
3. Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå, 6 September 1944.
4. Göteborgs Posten, 9 September 1944.

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information on the Finnish losses during this war, but as early as 26 July 1943 Borlingske Tidende stated that at that time "they are said to equal those of the first war and they may even be larger." Altogether this represents a tremendous gap in a total population of only 3,888,754 (as of 31 December 1940).¹ However, Finland's immediate problem is one of unemployment rather than of labor shortage. According to recent Finnish reports, after the armistice, one of the first tasks of the new Minister of Labor was to cancel the orders issued on the basis of the Labor Conscription Act, as much labor would be made available from wartime jobs for productive work. "Earlier there was a shortage of labor everywhere; there will soon be enough -- even a surplus in some fields."²

It remains to be seen in what way the final resettlement of the Karelians can be accomplished. No definite plans have as yet been drawn up. Finnish sources are vague on the point. "The Karelians", wrote Karjala, the organ of the Karelian evacuees, on 29 September 1944, "have, notwithstanding their struggle and sacrifices, again lost their part of the country," but it comforted the evacuees with the prospect of "building a new Karelia on the remnants of our common motherland."

1. "Die Bevölkerung Finnlands", Wirtschaft und Statistik, 1943, No. 11, p. 392.

2. Suomen Sosialidemokraatti, 8 October 1944.

On the other hand, recent information¹ suggests that the Soviet authorities would not be opposed to a return of Karelians. Soviet overtures leading to such a transfer are believed to have been made, and a considerable number of Karelians may return to their original homes under such an arrangement.

1. OSS source.